

**IN THE CLAIMS**

1. (Previously presented) A hydrogel having a floatability wherein from 40% to 90% of a solution or suspension to be thickened is thickened starting from the surface of the liquid and the rest of the solution or suspension to be thickened is thickened starting from the bottom of a container for the solution or suspension.
2. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 1 wherein a solidification time is less than 120 seconds and/or a blood absorbance is at least 10 g/g.
3. (Previously presented) A process for preparing a hydrogel comprising aftertreating a dried hydrogel with a hydrophobic compound, and optionally a hydrophilic compound.
4. (Currently amended) The ~~hydrogel~~ process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophobic compound and optional hydrophilic compound are particles having an average diameter from 0.001 to 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .
5. (Currently amended) The ~~hydrogel~~ process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas.
6. (Currently amended) The ~~hydrogel~~ process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.
7. (Currently amended) The ~~hydrogel~~ process of claim 3 wherein the ~~hydrogel~~ process is additionally aftertreated with a multivalent cation and an optional surfactant.
8. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the multivalent cation is an aluminum ion.
9. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the surfactant is a sorbitan ester.

10. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the multivalent cation is metered as an aqueous solution and the surfactant has an HLB value of less than 18.

11. (Previously presented) The process of claim 3 wherein the aftertreated hydrogel is dried.

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Previously presented) A hygiene article comprising a hydrogel of claim 1.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Previously presented) A method of absorbing blood, body fluids, or both comprising contacting the blood, body fluid, or both with a hydrogel of claim 1.

18. (Previously presented) The method of claim 17 wherein the hydrogel is present in a hygiene article.

19. (Previously presented) A method of thickening an aqueous solution or suspension comprising contacting the solution or suspension with a hydrogel of claim 1.

20. (Previously presented) A method of thickening medical wastes comprising contacting the medical waste with a hydrogel of claim 1.

21. (Previously presented) A composition comprising a hydrogel of claim 1 and one or more of a biocidal material, an antimicrobial material, an antibacterial material, a perfume or scent material, a stabilizer, a dye, and a pH indicator.

22. (Previously presented) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas.

23. (Previously presented) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.